

**RECRUITING, EMPOWERING AND RETAINING A  
DIVERSE CONGRESSIONAL STAFF**

---

---

**HEARING**

BEFORE THE

**SELECT COMMITTEE ON THE  
MODERNIZATION OF CONGRESS**

OF THE

**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

ONE HUNDRED SEVENTEENTH CONGRESS

SECOND SESSION

—————  
MAY 13, 2021  
—————

**Serial No. 117-05**

—————

Printed for the use of the Committee on the Modernization of Congress



Available via <http://govinfo.gov>

—————  
U.S. GOVERNMENT PUBLISHING OFFICE

WASHINGTON : 2022

48-589

**SELECT COMMITTEE ON THE MODERNIZATION OF CONGRESS**

DEREK KILMER, Washington, *Chair*

ZOE LOFGREN, California  
EMANUEL CLEAVER, Missouri  
ED PERLMUTTER, Colorado  
DEAN PHILLIPS, Minnesota  
NIKEMA WILLIAMS, Georgia

WILLIAM TIMMONS, South Carolina,  
*Vice Chair*  
BOB LATTA, Ohio  
RODNEY DAVIS, Illinois  
DAVE JOYCE, Ohio  
GUY RESCENTIALER, Pennsylvania  
BETH VAN DUYNE, Texas

**COMMITTEE STAFF**

YURI BECKLEMAN, *Staff Director*  
DEREK HARLEY, *Republican Staff Director*

# CONTENTS

## OPENING STATEMENTS

	Page
Chairman Derek Kilmer	
Oral Statement .....	1
Vice Chairman William Timmons	
Oral Statement .....	2

## WITNESSES

Ms. Kemba Hendrix, Director of the House Office of Diversity and Inclusion	
Oral Statement .....	4
Written Statement .....	6
Ms. Keenan Austin Reed, Former Chief of Staff and Co-Founder & Chair of the Black Women's Congressional Alliance	
Oral Statement .....	11
Written Statement .....	13
Mr. Gregg Orton, Former Chief of Staff	
Oral Statement .....	17
Written Statement .....	20
Ms. Maria Meier, Former Director of the Senate Democratic Diversity Initiative	
Oral Statement .....	24
Written Statement .....	26
Discussion .....	30



## RECRUITING, EMPOWERING, AND RETAINING A DIVERSE CONGRESSIONAL STAFF

THURSDAY, MAY 13, 2021

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,  
SELECT COMMITTEE ON THE  
MODERNIZATION OF CONGRESS,  
*Washington, DC.*

The committee met, pursuant to call, at 9:03 a.m., via Zoom, Hon. Derek Kilmer [chairman of the committee] presiding.

Present: Representatives Kilmer, Cleaver, Perlmutter, Phillips, Williams of Georgia, Timmons, Rodney Davis of Illinois, Latta, Reschenthaler, and Van Duyne.

The CHAIRMAN. With that, the committee will come to order.

Without objection, the chair is authorized to declare a recess of the committee at any time.

And I now recognize myself for 5 minutes to give an opening statement.

So, in preparing for this hearing today, I actually looked back at the work this committee did on staff diversity in the 116th Congress, and I was struck by a few things. You know, our work began with a member meeting devoted to first talking about diversity more broadly and then as it applied to Congress, and we talked and, more importantly, listened to each other in an effort to find common ground and figure out how the committee should structure a hearing on the topic.

And, through that discussion and through many since, it is clear that our experience as individuals and as members of larger groups and communities profoundly shape how we process daily life and experience daily life. Our experiences shape how we see ourselves in relation to others and how we react to and with the world around us. And recognizing that and respecting that fundamental reality I think builds empathy.

Last year, just as we began a series of virtual discussions on staff capacity and diversity, the Nation was seeing in communities all over this country demonstrations over the murder of George Floyd, and the work we were doing felt inconsequential compared to what was happening right outside our doors. But it was, and I think continues to be, a lesson in how our own histories and experiences shape the way we understand and react to the events in our lives.

That same lesson applies to the events that unfolded at the Capitol on the 6th of January. Members and staff are still processing what they experienced that day and will continue to do so for some time to come. But to assume that everyone who works in the Cap-

itol reacted to January 6 the same way would be to ignore the lived experiences of every person who was here that day.

For more than a year now, we have been living through a global pandemic, something very few of us have ever experienced, and we are now beginning the slow process of returning to normal. But, for so many of our fellow Americans, normal now looks very different. Thousands of people have lost loved ones and have suffered tremendous financial loss. The pandemic has been a shared experience but with vastly different outcomes, and for that reason, recovering from the pandemic will mean radically different things to different people based on what they have gone through.

So all of this is to say that this committee began its work on diversity with the understanding that our lived experiences affect the way we see and interact with the world around us, and this past year has thrown a number of intense experiences our way, and we have all processed them in accordance with what we know.

So our job as Representatives is to give voice to the people we serve, and that responsibility is bestowed upon us from the moment we are sworn into office. The beauty and the challenge of upholding that responsibility lies in the fact that we speak for so many. Our constituents are diverse in their backgrounds, in their experiences and views, and it is our job to listen.

It is also the job of our staff to listen, and they are often the first people our constituents encounter when they reach out to the Federal Government for help. Staff also help Members make sense of complicated policy questions, and given the diversity of people and policies that staff encounter daily, the experiences and histories they bring to the job matter a lot.

Our constituents are better served by staff who reflect the diversity in our own districts and in our own country, and Members are better served by staff who bring a diversity of perspectives to the policymaking process. We do our jobs better when we are willing to acknowledge that we don't know everything and when we are willing to listen and learn from people whose experiences are different from our own.

Building a more diverse congressional staff is a process, and today we are joined by a panel of experts who are going to help us understand why investing in this process is so important. I am looking forward to hearing about the work they have done and their recommendations for how Congress can recruit and retain a workforce that looks like America.

And, with that, I would now like to invite Vice Chair Timmons to share some opening remarks as well.

Mr. TIMMONS. Thanks, Mr. Chairman, and thank you to our witnesses for being here today for this important hearing.

Since the establishment of this committee, we have made staff retention and diversity a top priority. When we talk about modernizing Congress, we don't just mean updating the technology in the House but investing in and developing a talented and diverse workforce that accurately reflects the communities we represent.

In the 116th Congress, we made a recommendation to make permanent the Office of Diversity and Inclusion, and I am pleased that this recommendation came to fruition and is now a permanent office. However, other than the creation of a human resources hub,

which we recommended and envisioned in part as a way to help diversity recruitment, the Office of Diversity and Inclusion was really the only recommendation made last Congress that dealt directly with diversity in Congress.

There is a lot of diversity just on this committee and the constituencies we represent. Just as our constituents have unique backgrounds and different experiences, those who come to work on the Hill are no different.

In both this Congress and last Congress, we have heard from many witnesses on ways Congress can improve its hiring practices and promote diversity and inclusion broadly, whether it be for people of color, disadvantaged communities, people with disabilities, different socioeconomic backgrounds, and varied geographic locations.

I am looking forward to hearing from our expert witnesses today on ways we can continue to recruit and retain a diverse and talented workforce that better reflects the diversity of the American people.

Again, thank you for your leadership, Mr. Chairman. This is a top priority for this Congress, and we need to get it right, so I just appreciate you working so hard on this.

And, with that, I will yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Mr. Vice Chair.

And today we are joined by four witnesses. Witnesses are reminded that your oral testimony will be limited to 5 minutes.

And, without objection, your written statements will be made part of the record.

Our first witness is Kemba Hendrix. Ms. Hendrix serves as the Director of the Office of Diversity and Inclusion, where she works to cultivate an inclusive environment in the House with a workforce that reflects the diversity of the country they serve.

Prior to her appointment as the inaugural director of the House ODI, Ms. Hendrix served as the Director of the House Democratic Diversity Initiative, where she focused on increasing House Democratic workforce diversity and expanding opportunities for diverse candidates at all House staff levels.

She has also worked within several organizations prior to joining the ODI, including the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, the U.S. Department of State as a legal advisor to the chief diversity officer and Office of Civil Rights, and the U.S. Office of Personnel Management.

Ms. Hendrix, you are now recognized for 5 minutes to give an oral presentation of your testimony.

Oops. Sorry, we still have you on mute. Sorry.

Ms. HENDRIX. Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. There we got it.

**STATEMENTS OF KEMBA HENDRIX, DIRECTOR OF THE HOUSE OFFICE OF DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION; KEENAN AUSTIN REED, FORMER CHIEF OF STAFF AND CO-FOUNDER & CHAIR OF THE BLACK WOMEN'S CONGRESSIONAL ALLIANCE, ON BEHALF OF HERSELF; GREGG ORTON, FORMER CHIEF OF STAFF, ON BEHALF OF HIMSELF; AND MARIA MEIER, FORMER DIRECTOR OF THE SENATE DEMOCRATIC DIVERSITY INITIATIVE**

**STATEMENT OF KEMBA HENDRIX**

Ms. HENDRIX. Good morning, Chairman Kilmer, Ranking Member Timmons, and the members of the select committee. My name is Kemba Hendrix, and I am the Director of the Office of Diversity and Inclusion.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today on our shared perspective of diversity, recruitment, retention of the House workforce. It is my honor and privilege to speak on behalf of my team and with their support.

OD&I's dynamic diverse bipartisan team is one that I feel privileged to work alongside every day. Over the past year, the Office of Diversity and Inclusion has worked tirelessly to serve the House. That was a possibility because bipartisan House leadership and this committee were committed to and believed in the power of diversity and teamwork.

In our inaugural year, we have executed a comprehensive staffing plan, delivered an operations plan, and a diversity plan to House leadership, developed strategies for engaging with House employment offices, colleges, universities, and other stakeholders.

Furthermore, the office has completed a novel barrier analysis of the House workforce. Some of the outcomes of this data collection are shared in the information we submitted for the record. We have engaged with over a thousand job seekers, and many of the many exceptionally qualified and diverse individual job seekers have become our colleagues.

Of the many accomplishments that we have worked together collaboratively to exceed, in all of this that our staff has done, some of this is what points to the benefits of recruiting, maintaining, and supporting a diverse staff, something that we all view as a critical goal.

While I intend to discuss our analysis and recommendations today, I would also like to briefly discuss how COVID-19 has impacted our staff and our funding.

While our staff has continued to work, members of my team, like many of the others of the staff community, have lost family members and friends, acted as caregivers to our families, managed virtual school for children, experienced medical incidents that required either extensive testing or hospitalization. One of my staffers is studying for the bar while working full time. All of this on top of a global pandemic, historic civil unrest, and the January 6th attack on our place of employment. What we experienced as a team is not unique, but it does represent a microcosm of what has happened here at the House.

The events of the last year have tested many communities, including the community of the House. Communities that are dis-



proportionately impacted are exactly those communities that are home to many of the diverse staffers on the Hill, including but not limited, to Black, indigenous, Asian, Hispanic, LGBTQIA, and people with disabilities. We, and I say “we” because as a diverse House staff, we are the people living this experience.

Our staffers who utilize the Office of Diversity and Inclusion as a resource frequently recommend programming and services they would like to see from us. Recently those recommendations have included many things, but what I will speak to are recommendation that have included OD&I House-led staff support groups, executive coaching for senior staff, a core curriculum that would include cultural competence for senior staffers, facilitated discussions on race, bias, experiencing microaggressions in the workplace, professional communication, team building, and many other things. And while we would like to provide all of those services and more to the House community, we know that other resources or offices may be more appropriate, and the recommendations we submitted sometimes do reflect that.

Furthermore, OD&I’s diversity, equity, and inclusion barrier analysis offers insights, support, and relevant data about what staffers believe are substantive hurdles for diverse staffers. The results of reporting identifies what staffers believe from various demographic groups, and they seem to believe that they are often overlooked in consideration for House leadership roles and promotions. Many employees feel that the only way they can get promotion is either to leave their current office or to leave the Hill entirely, which makes creating a pipeline of diverse staffers, a sustainable pipeline for leaders of color and those from nontraditional backgrounds very difficult.

The barrier analysis provides anecdotal insights into their beliefs and feelings of the participants about the unique hurdles that they face, many of which were exacerbated by the events of January 6. Additionally, what staffers communicated seems to be a lack of awareness about available resources. And compounding that issue for staffers who are aware of existing resources is that some expressed a feeling that those resources may not meet their unique needs. It should be noted that these are observations that may not actually be the views of all House staffers.

After stating these challenges, I want to circle back to what I stated at the beginning of my testimony and speak about my exceptional and resilient staff. I believe our staff remains resilient because of our diversity and our concerted efforts at inclusion and belonging within our staff.

I am grateful for this opportunity to connect with the select committee and testify on our shared and important work on modernizing and strengthening the House community, your thoughtful and sustained attention to these critical issues and making a meaningful and positive difference and making a better House community and specifically a better American community.

I thank you for your leadership and the opportunity to contribute to your work.

[The statement of Ms. Hendrix follows:]

**Written Testimony of Kemba Hendrix, Director, House Office of Diversity and Inclusion  
Before the Select Committee on the Modernization of Congress  
Re: Recruiting, Empowering and Retaining a Diverse Congressional Staff  
May 13, 2021**

Good morning, Chairman Kilmer, Ranking Member Timmons, and Members of the Select Committee. My name is Kemba Hendrix, and I am the Director of the Office of Diversity & Inclusion (ODI). Thank you for the opportunity to speak today and to share ODI's perspective on diversity, recruitment, and retention of the House workforce. It is an honor and privilege to speak on behalf of, and with the support of, my staff. ODI as a team is newly formed, with a dynamic, diverse, bipartisan group of staffers assembled over the course of the last year. Every day, I feel privileged to work alongside people dedicated to serving the House and who work in support of the critical goals of diversity and inclusion.

Over the past year, the Office of Diversity and Inclusion has worked tirelessly to serve the House. That was possible because Bi-partisan House Leadership and this Committee were committed to and believed in the power of diversity and teamwork. In our inaugural year we executed a comprehensive staffing plan, delivered an operations plan and a diversity plan to House leadership, developed strategies for engaging with House employment offices, colleges, universities, and other stakeholders. Furthermore, the office has completed a novel barrier analysis of the House workforce. Some outcomes of this data collection are shared in the information submitted for the record. We have engaged with over a thousand job seekers, and helped many, many exceptionally qualified and diverse individuals become colleagues.

ODI's exceptionally qualified and diverse staff was recruited through a highly competitive process. Our internal planning, training, and professional development is continually focused on growing our ability to support House Offices as they work to embrace and leverage diversity, as well as expand their own efforts to recruit, develop, retain, and advance exceptional talent that reflects the full scope of the diversity spectrum. In our inaugural year we have worked to harness the benefits and reap the rewards of diversity by working together collaboratively. And it points to the benefits of recruiting, maintaining, and supporting a diverse staff—something that we view as a critical goal. While I intend to discuss our analyses and recommendations today, I would also like to briefly discuss how COVID-19 impacted these findings by using the staff of the Office of Diversity & Inclusion as an example.

The 8 members of my team have worked to support the advancement of diversity and inclusion as goals here in the House. I acknowledge this not because it is unique to the culture of our workplace, in fact, quite the opposite. However, I would like to mention some things that I am aware were happening at the same time. While they continued to work, members of my team, like other members of the House community, lost family members and friends, acted as caregivers to family members, managed virtual school for children experienced medical incidents that required extensive testing and hospitalization, and one is studying for the bar while working full time—all of this on top of a global pandemic, historic civil unrest, and the January 6<sup>th</sup> attack on our place of employment. What we experienced as a team is not unique, but it does represent a microcosm of what has happened here in the House.

**Written Testimony of Kemba Hendrix, Director, House Office of Diversity and Inclusion  
Before the Select Committee on the Modernization of Congress  
Re: Recruiting, Empowering and Retaining a Diverse Congressional Staff  
May 13, 2021**

The events of the last year have tested many communities, including the House community. We have faced the stress of the pandemic and social isolation, personal loss, civil unrest, and violence of many kinds. The communities that are disproportionately impacted are exactly those communities that are home to so many of the diverse staffers on the Hill, including, but not limited to, Black/Indigenous/Asian/Hispanic, LGBTQIA, and people with disabilities. We, and I say we, because as a diverse House staff, we are the people living this experience.

House staffers who utilize the Office of Diversity & Inclusion as a resource frequently recommend programming and services, they would like to see us provide. Recently, these recommendations have included ODI-lead staff support groups, ODI-conduct executive coaching for Senior Staff that would include a curriculum on cultural competence, and lead facilitated discussions on race/ bias/ experiencing microaggression in the workplace/ /professional communication/ and team building. While we would like to provide all these services to the House community, some may be beyond our capacity, training, or experience. We also know that other resource offices may be more appropriate, and our recommendations reflect that.

Furthermore, ODI's 2020 Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Barrier Analysis offers insights, support, and relevant data about what staffers believe are substantive hurdles for diverse staffers. The resulting report identifies that staffers from various demographic groups feel "overlooked" in consideration for leadership roles and/or promotion. Many House employees feel the only way to get a promotion is to leave one's current office or the Hill, which makes it increasingly difficult to build a sustainable pipeline for leaders of color, or from non-traditional backgrounds.

The 2020 Barrier Analysis provided anecdotal insight into the thoughts and feelings of the participants, who were House staffers at the time of the focus groups, about the unique hurdles they faced, which may have been exacerbated by the events of January 6<sup>th</sup>. Many staffers, particularly staffers of color, have stated that they do not feel safe at work. Additionally, staffers communicated a lack of awareness of available resources. Compounding the issue, for those staffers aware of the existing resources some expressed feeling those resources do not meet their unique needs. It should be noted that this observation has been expressed anecdotally and may not be the view of all House staffers.

After stating all these challenges for staffers in the House community, I want to circle back to where I began this testimony—speaking about the exceptional and resilient staff of ODI and say this. I believe our staff remains resilient because of our diversity and our concerted efforts at inclusion and belonging within our staff. I am grateful for the opportunity to connect with the Select Committee to testify today on shared, important work to modernize and strengthen the House community. Your thoughtful and sustained attention to these critical issues is making a meaningful and positive difference for the House community specifically, and our country. I thank you for your leadership and the opportunity to contribute to your work.

**Written Testimony of Kemba Hendrix, Director, House Office of Diversity and Inclusion  
Before the Select Committee on the Modernization of Congress  
Re: Recruiting, Empowering and Retaining a Diverse Congressional Staff  
May 13, 2021**

**Recommendations:**

- Recommendation: We recommend increasing support office resources, so staffers have access to a robust menu of capabilities to support the trajectory of their career and professional development, in hopes that they will feel supported and that this will lead to greater retention.
  - (i.e. Office of Employee Assistance, Wellness Center, Office of the Chaplain, Office of Congressional Workplace Rights, Office of the Whistleblower Ombuds, Office of Employee Advocacy, Congressional Staff Academy)
  - Training and development menu should have some elements that are mandatory, with other highly suggested elements for office leaders that focus on leadership, management, communication, and cultural competence for leading diverse teams.
- Recommendation: The Office of Employee Assistance should be allocated increased resources to provide a menu of services that meets the needs of all House employees. While it is known that resources are incredibly limited, with respect to counseling, an individual's perception can have an impact on the effectiveness of the outcomes.
  - *In focus groups conducted for the 2020 Barrier Analysis report, "House employees of color expressed that they hear prejudicial language more often toward staffers of color."*
  - *Likewise, "LGBTQIA+ supervisory and non-supervisory House employees feel fellow employees often show a lack of awareness of the culture of this group (e.g., pronoun disclosure, gender non-conforming acceptance)."*
  - *"Some House employees experience insensitivity to religious differences based on comments from colleagues."*
  - *Microaggressions are frequent: e.g., regularly calling a minority employee by the name of another employee with the same race/ethnicity/religion/etc.*
  - *Pigeonholing in assignments because demographic fits the community. E.g., Hispanic/Latino staffers assigned to immigration/Spanish-speaking community, Black staffers do diversity-related work.*
  - *Advocating for ADA accommodations is exhausting and "emotionally draining."*
- Recommendation: There should be a standardized and centralized Human Resource Hub run by the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) that includes standardized position descriptions, a House-wide mentoring program, and fair and equitable pay bands. Additionally, we recommend the House move away from collecting demographic information by periodic survey and move towards collecting demographic information with a standardized, optional form at hire.
  - *The compensation and diversity study, conducted each Congress, could then provide hiring managers the resources and / tools for setting [fair equitable salary ranges](#).*
  - *Creating or using OPM standard form to collect race/ethnicity information at hire to simplify data collection for employee demographic information (not the mandate*

**Written Testimony of Kemba Hendrix, Director, House Office of Diversity and Inclusion  
Before the Select Committee on the Modernization of Congress  
Re: Recruiting, Empowering and Retaining a Diverse Congressional Staff  
May 13, 2021**

*outlined in LEGISLATIVE BRANCH APPROPRIATIONS BILL, 2021, but could get close to capturing information for all new hires).*

**Findings from the 2020 Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Barrier Analysis:**

- 2020 Barrier Analysis report: “Many House employees feel the only way to get a promotion is to leave one’s current office because there [are] only a few leadership positions available.” And this is being borne out in real time as people have left in the past month for private sector and administration jobs.
- 2020 Barrier Analysis report identifies that employees feel that Hispanic/Latino and non-supervisory female staff are “often overlooked” for leadership roles in favor of less-qualified white employees.
- 2020 Barrier Analysis report: “Black and House managers of color feel people of color are frequently overlooked for promotions, and opportunities are not always given due to a lack of formal job requirements and processes.”
- 2020 Barrier Analysis report: “Using networks to recruit and hire is limiting because those networks are mostly made up of wealthy, white, and/or political families or individuals; minorities or individuals from lower socioeconomic classes are often not a part of these networks.”
- 2020 Barrier Analysis report: “Hispanic/Latino House employees expressed that they have to compete with individuals who have an array of previously established networks to which they do not have access, and these networked individuals are often prioritized for opportunities.”
- 2020 Barrier Analysis report: “House employees feel Members often hire staffers who look like them (e.g., white males), and this is often not a woman or person of color given the demographic makeup of current House Members.”
- Many restrooms, parking lots, meeting rooms, buildings are not ADA accessible; for employees with disabilities this is “a significant barrier to performing their job efficiently and/or to advancement,” as the Barrier Analysis found.
- Anecdotal information expressed to or observed by ODI:
  - We are losing staff, particularly women/BIPOC staff in legislative roles, as they head to the private sector and federal government.
  - Women, ethnic/racial minorities, LGBTQIA+ and people with disabilities are severely underrepresented in leadership roles. Both retention and recruitment are a challenge. How do we demonstrate to people they are valued for their skills?
- Illustrative quotes from focus groups included in 2020 Barrier Analysis report:
  - “I do not believe members or staff were actively ‘malicious’ toward people of color; however, I did feel unconscious biases were guiding decision making and incidentally perpetuating racial discrepancies at work.”

**Written Testimony of Kemba Hendrix, Director, House Office of Diversity and Inclusion  
Before the Select Committee on the Modernization of Congress  
Re: Recruiting, Empowering and Retaining a Diverse Congressional Staff  
May 13, 2021**

- “We have so many women who are junior staffers and there is no opportunity to move up. In order to move up, they have to leave. They just get replaced and it becomes a cycle.”
- “I think that in my particular office, women of color are not supported and are left to fend for themselves, with the expectation that they understand the nuances of our colleagues, and it’s not reciprocated. No one is attempting to understand the nuance of how we see things in our work.”
- “I believe my disability was at play when I was passed over for a senior staffer position. In the process of interviews, the position description was changed to involve more outreach and thus was given to someone else who could walk, and I do think that was a factor.”
- “Sometimes I avoid going to meetings because the doors are too narrow to get through and sometimes you have to constantly rely on others to open a door for you to get into a meeting, it’s frustrating. There are two bathrooms in my building that I can use. There is not a single bathroom I can use where my boss’s committee hearings are.”
- “We bring on non-traditional staffers, but then they don’t know how to communicate the way that some of the white leaders like ... or sometimes their clothing is different, and they get judged. My transness is tokenized in my office a bit. They often asked me to work on things that don’t make sense – not my portfolio – due to my gender and race.”

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Ms. Hendrix. Thank you for your testimony and for your leadership of ODI.

Our second witness is Keenan Austin Reed, vice president of the Alpine Group and a veteran of Capitol Hill. She served as chief of staff to Congressman Donald McEachin and led his work as the whip of the Congressional Black Caucus.

In 2018, Ms. Austin Reed cofounded the Black Women's Congressional Alliance, a membership organization of more than 300 bipartisan and bicameral Black women Hill staffers. She has led dozens of professional development briefings, events, and webinars to inform staffers about new career opportunities, provided a platform to elevate their profiles to the broader Capitol Hill community, and pushed growth in diverse hiring in the United States House and Senate.

Previously she served as chief of staff to D.C. Council Member David Grosso and as deputy chief of staff and senior advisor to Congresswoman Frederica Wilson.

Ms. Austin Reed, you are now recognized for 5 minutes.

#### **STATEMENT OF KEENAN AUSTIN REED**

Ms. AUSTIN REED. Thank you. Good morning, Chairman Kilmer and Vice Chair Timmons, members of the committee, staff, and interns.

I am grateful for this committee for creating a space to advocate for staff, and it is a pleasure to be with you. As the chair stated, I am Keenan Austin Reed. I serve as vice president at Alpine. I recently ended my decade-long career as a Hill staffer this past January, and previously I served as chief to Donald McEachin, deputy chief to Congresswoman Frederica Wilson. I am also a wife to a current chief of staff, which beyond my affinity to see Congress as an institution continue to evolve, keeps me closely tied to its success.

In 2018, I co-founded and currently chair the Black Women's Congressional Alliance, an organization representing over 300 Black women staffers, with a goal to increase the number of Black women serving in senior staff positions in Congress and providing them professional and personal support, particularly as they seek more senior roles.

Retaining staff goes beyond what staff are paid. It is about the community and experience, and we choose this work as more than a job. It is a calling. Improving the dynamics of the workplace and hiring significantly boosts job satisfaction and fulfillment.

While there are many longstanding and underlying issues in empowering and supporting diverse staff, the current climate is particularly challenging. For all that love this institution, January 6th was and very much still is unnerving. Staff of color, who felt especially targeted by hate symbols displayed by the mob, continue to feel angry, unsafe, and unprotected. And despite this emotional toll, these staffers continue to serve, allowing the work of the Congress to go largely uninterrupted.

Pay disparities, underrepresentation at the highest levels, structural inequality, and cultural bias leaves staff of color feeling disenfranchised. The insurrection only compounded this.

I commend the leaders of staff-led organizations who have supported their peers during this time and challenge us all to improve. It is with this in mind that I make the following recommendations.

First, professionalize hiring to attract a wider and more diverse talent pool. I strongly encourage the Congress to invest in the expansion of our House Diversity Office to include recruitment staff. Currently, hiring managers are tapping into their networks of a select few people of color to produce a diverse talent pool. It is a strong start, and it demonstrates intent beyond hiring the traditional network of candidates, but the burden of hiring people of color should not exclusively rest on people of color to produce candidates from their networks. I, along with many others, have volunteered and supplied resumes and recommended candidates. But this work is hindered by those who do it often have other full-time jobs, and our reach does not go far or wide enough.

Next, we must provide cultural competency for these offices. For offices that are making their very first diverse hire or those that have hired diverse candidates in more junior roles but never see those staffers transition to the leadership of the office, we need to provide greater support for the competency of that office. It is not enough to hire a diverse candidate. We must make sure that the environment is ready to integrate them into the work of the office. We should also recognize that an environment that has had a homogenous staff for the majority of its history will need to make some cultural adjustments.

Lastly, establish a diversity, equity, and inclusion point person in each office and give a compensation adjustment to support that work. The success of DEI principles demands that the ideology be accepted fully in how the office does that work. It must have member-level engagement and buy-in and be continuously prioritized.

I commend the work of Senator Tammy Duckworth, who is already doing this.

I recommend that that staffer become the internal support for that office and the member in chief for those issues, which could include leading or initiating culturally sensitive conversations, ensuring diverse networks are engaged in the hiring of interns and staff, supporting staff by identifying professional growth and mentorship opportunities, and expanding stakeholder engagement to support legislative goals. This staffer should receive a pay increase for doing this work.

It is critical that we recognize that diversity in congressional offices is a prerequisite to fulfilling the tenets of our democracy.

Thank you for your consideration of my testimony, and I welcome questions and followup by the committee.

[The statement of Ms. Austin Reed follows:]



**Testimony by Keenan Austin Reed, Former Chief of Staff and Co-Founder & Chair of the  
Black Women's Congressional Alliance**

**Before the Select Committee on the Modernization of Congress  
"Recruiting, Empowering and Retaining a Diverse Congressional Staff"  
May 13, 2021**

Good afternoon Chair Kilmer, Vice-Chair Timmons, Members of the Committee, staff, and interns. I appreciate the opportunity to serve our institution in this capacity. I am very grateful for the work of this Committee and the intense review and care you are taking to improve Congress and creating a space to advocate for staff.

I am Keenan Austin Reed and I currently serve as Vice President for the Alpine Group. I recently ended my decade-long career as a Hill staffer this past January. Through the end of 2020, I served as Chief of Staff to Congressman A. Donald McEachin of Virginia's Fourth Congressional District. Before working for Mr. McEachin, I was Deputy Chief of Staff for Congresswoman Frederica Wilson from Florida. I am also a wife to a current chief of staff in the House of Representatives, which beyond my affinity to see Congress as an institution continue to evolve, keeps me closely tied to its success.

In 2018, I co-founded and currently chair the Black Women's Congressional Alliance, an organization representing over 300 Black women congressional staffers with a goal to increase the number of Black women serving in staff positions in Congress and providing professional and personal support for Black women who are currently on the Hill, particularly as they seek more senior roles. At the time of our founding, there was no Black woman serving as chief of staff to a Democratic senator, and Black women were severely underrepresented in senior positions such as chief of staff and committee director roles.

BWCA was founded with the recognition that critical information about job openings and opportunities to advance are frequently not advertised, so we sought to build our own peer-based network of information sharing that not only discussed the opportunities available. We also prepare our members for how to get the job and advocate for them getting the position.

In doing this work, we have placed dozens of staffers successfully and I have had the opportunity to spend many hours talking to staff as they ready themselves to take the role. I have followed up with the staff and their hiring managers after our members have been in the role a while to see if the staffer is excelling and how they are adjusting to the culture of the office. It is in these conversations that I have been most instructive on how we support, retain, recruit and attract talented staffers.

Capitol Hill is a special place to work and those who choose this work come to it with a purpose to improve their community and better their country. Retaining staff goes beyond what staff are paid, it is about the community and the experience. We choose this work as more than a job; it is a calling. Improving the dynamics of the workplace and hiring can significantly boost job satisfaction and fulfillment.

While there are many longstanding and underlying issues in empowering and supporting diverse staff, the current climate is particularly challenging. For all that love this institution, January 6 was and very much is still unnerving. Staff of color, who felt especially targeted by the hate symbols displayed by the angry mob, continue to feel angry, unsafe, and unprotected. Despite the emotional toll, these staffers continue to serve, allowing the work of Congress to go on largely uninterrupted. Pay disparities, severe underrepresentation at the highest levels, structural inequality, and cultural bias leave staff of color disenfranchised. The Insurrection compounded this. I commend the leaders of staff-led associations, like the Congressional Black Associates and the Senate Black Legislative Staff Caucus, who have supported their peers during this time and challenged Congress to improve.

It is with this in mind, that I make the following recommendations:

- **Professionalize hiring to attract a wider and more diverse talent pool.** I strongly encourage the House to invest in the expansion of our House diversity office to include recruitment staff. Currently hiring managers are tapping into their networks of a select few people of color to produce a diverse candidate pool. This is a strong start and demonstrates the intent to hire beyond the traditional network of candidates, but the burden of hiring people of color should not exclusively rest on people of color to produce candidates from their networks. I, along with many others, have voluntarily supplied resumes and recommended candidates, but this work is hindered by those who do it have other full-time jobs and the reach does not go far or wide enough.
- **Provide specific support for entry and mid-level diverse staff to retain talent.** Frequently after an office makes a push to hire a diverse candidate, once the candidate is in the office the staffer struggles to ascend. When I speak to hiring managers, the ability to adapt to the culture of the office or the staffer is unable to fulfill the obligations of the role are cited as reasons why the candidates do not move up the ladder. When I speak to the staffer, the staffer cites that they feel overlooked for opportunities to expand their role, do not fit in with the culture of the office, and generally feel unseen. For offices making their initial diverse hire or those that have hired diverse candidates in junior roles but never see those staffers transition into the leadership of the office, we need to provide greater support for the cultural competency of that office. It is not enough to hire a diverse candidate, we must make sure that the environment is ready to integrate them

fully into the work of the office. We should also recognize that an environment that has had a homogeneous staff for the majority of its history will need to make some cultural adjustments. To capitalize on the experience and subject matter expertise gained by staff currently on the Hill, it is important that offices look to retain staff and prioritize their growth. Busy congressional offices are overwhelmed with responding to the needs of constituents and demanding legislative schedules, it would be best if an entity external to the office tracks and supports these offices.

- **Establish a DEI point person in each office and giving a compensation adjustment to support the work.** In 2011, I started as a senior advisor to Congresswoman Frederica Wilson, a jack of all trades position that included managing a legislative portfolio and filling in gaps where the Member needed in scheduling, communications, or district events. The Congresswoman's trust in my abilities and judgment allowed me the freedom to learn every role in a House personal office. That foundation would allow me to train, mentor, and advise hundreds of staff, though none of this would have been possible without the guidance of my first chief of staff, Tasha Cole, who challenged me to have a substantive legislative portfolio and identified new ways to push my growth as a Hill staffer. As a Black woman, she understood the barriers I would face as a new staffer of color. It is with this experience in mind that I recommend a diversity, equity, and inclusion point person for each personal office and committee.

The success of diversity, equity, and inclusion principles demand that this ideology be accepted fully in how an office does its work, have Member-level engagement and buy-in, and continuously be prioritized. I recommend a staffer become the internal office support for the Member and chief for these issues, which could include: leading or initiating culturally sensitive conversations, ensuring diverse networks are engaged in the hiring of interns and staff, supporting diverse staff by identifying professional growth and mentorship opportunities and expanding stakeholder engagement to support legislative goals.

- I also support the following recommendations previously made by Members and stakeholders to the Committee:
  - **Expand and innovate the Office of Employee Assessment(OEA).** OEA should be available to contract employees, like food service, and should retain a diverse workforce. OEA needs to provide bilingual services and offer racial trauma services. Rep. Katherine Clark

- **Mandate cultural competency and implicit bias training/ Training for anti-racist work environments.** Issue One and Partnership for Public Service
- **Recruit from community colleges, trade schools, HCBUs, non-traditional sources.** College to Congress, Center New American Security.

Thank you for your consideration of my testimony and I welcome questions and follow-up by the Committee.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Ms. Austin Reed, and you stuck the landing of 5 minutes. Well done.

Our next witness is Gregg Orton. Mr. Orton is the national director of the National Council of Asian Pacific Americans, where he leads the coalition in developing policy and communication strategy and advancing a joint agenda to address the needs of the Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander communities.

Prior to joining the council, Mr. Orton spent 9 years working on Capitol Hill for Representative Al Green. He has served as a dedicated advocate for the AAPI community, as well as a mentor for many AAPI staffers in Congress.

Mr. Orton, you are now recognized for 5 minutes.

#### STATEMENT OF GREGG ORTON

Mr. ORTON. Thank you.

Good morning, Chair Kilmer, Vice Chair Timmons, members of the select committee. As was mentioned, my name is Gregg Orton, and while I currently serve as the national director of the National Council of Asian Pacific Americans, which is the leading coalition of 37 of the most prominent Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander civil rights organizations in the country, I am here today to share my personal views as it relates to the current state of staff diversity in Congress. And I certainly appreciate the opportunity to be back amongst friends and certainly back amongst at least the virtual halls of Congress.

Before I begin, I would like to note that my very presence here today is an example of what is possible when a congressional office is meaningfully and authentically committed to diversity, equity, and inclusion. I simply wouldn't be here to share my experiences but for Congressman Al Green and his former chief of staff, Jackie Ellis. You know, she in her own right was a trailblazer for diversity, and for them to both take a chance on a then young Korean American adoptee, given the chance to make mistakes, learn, and eventually build a skill set that served not only the constituents of the Ninth Congressional District but now the national AAPI community, that is a remarkable and humbling thing.

My written testimony contains a number of similar recommendations based on my observation as it relates to pay and staffing structure, but I really want to focus my remarks today on the experiences of Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander staffers that I have had the privilege and opportunity to interact with.

To start with, many of the staffers that I still talk to today began their careers when I was still on the Hill, and so it is with great pride that I have watched many of them put in the time to put themselves in a position to be eligible, at least on paper, with the number of years of experience for coveted senior roles. But in reality, many of them that I talk to now express a sense of real frustration and are approaching burnout or reached it already.

And so, coupled with the fact that we know that missed perceptions about our community persist, my belief is that there remains a real need for unconscious bias training amongst all congressional offices and hiring managers. Harmful stereotypes about monolithic community success or the fact that maybe Asian Americans are too

quiet and timid to be successful in leading a congressional team are harmful, and they are incorrect, and it is long past time that Congress tried to address those things.

As it relates to staff organizations, I will simply say that I think Congress should fund them. They create vital environments for staffers to thrive. I know that I wouldn't have made it for as long as I did without the support of colleagues and friends and also a place to build meaningful friendships.

Simply because community spaces clearly will create themselves on the Hill doesn't mean that institutionally Congress shouldn't support them.

I personally believe that Congress is a remarkable place to work, and the truth is that Asian-American staffers on a day-to-day basis face racial microaggressions that can make the experience quite isolating and frustrating. Some of these elicit amusement; others elicit much more painful responses. One example would be it is sort of a rite of passage, I think, for all staffers of color to eventually be mistaken for one another or a Member of Congress. I will be honest, today I would be flattered to be mistaken for some of the Asian-American chiefs that are still on the Hill, and I am glad to consider them friends. I am also proud to see that they have climbed the ranks.

The truth is, though, that there is one personal experience that I will always carry, and this goes back to 2010 when there were protesters on the Hill concerned about the Affordable Care Act. For those members who were present when, they will remember that the halls were flooded with protestors, and I remember riding an elevator in Longworth, standing next to a few of those protesters, and regarding one and perceiving a look of a mixture of disdain and disbelief and being told that they couldn't believe they let foreigners work in Congress.

Fast forward to today and January 6th. I can only imagine how Asian American, Pacific Islander staffers must feel after navigating a year of the COVID-19 pandemic. You know, staff were taught to take verbal punishment and slights with grace and service of constituents, but the anti-Asian rhetoric that has been politicized, it has got to carry weight for many of them. And if not for themselves, then for fear for their parents, their grandparents, their elders, and many of those who have become targets for this violence.

In conclusion, I will say I truly believe the staffers of color are resilient as they are brilliant. To choose to work in a place surrounded by everyday reminders that you don't belong and then turn those reminders into motivation to work harder is precisely why Congress should be spending more resources and time in promoting greater diversity. So many of us have watched our families struggle to navigate government, watch government harm us or ignore us completely, and it is far past time that we address some of those inequities.

It is a privilege to work in Congress, but it shouldn't be exclusive to those who are already privileged, and I hope that the select committee will continue this important work and encourage their colleagues to lean in as well because I think this is one solution that is really going to require the entirety of the institution to get it right.

So thank you again for the opportunity to be here today, and I look forward to answering questions.  
[The statement of Mr. Orton follows:]

**Written Testimony of Gregg Orton, former Chief of Staff, Rep. Al Green (D-TX)****Before the Select Committee on the Modernization of Congress  
Hearing on “*Recruiting, Empowering and Retaining a Diverse Congressional Staff*”  
May 13, 2021 at 9 AM**

Good morning, Chair Kilmer, Vice-Chair Timmons, Members of the Select Committee. My name is Gregg Orton, I previously served as Chief of Staff for Congressman Al Green. While I currently serve as the National Director of the National Council of Asian Pacific Americans (NCAPA), the leading coalition of 37 of the most prominent Asian American, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander (AAPI) civil rights organizations in the country, I am here today in my personal capacity to share my thoughts on the current state of diversity of staff in Congress. Thank you for the opportunity to join you today, and thank you for this important work, which is near and dear to my heart.

Before I begin, I would note that my very presence here is an example to what is possible when a Congressional office is meaningfully and authentically committed to diversity, equity and inclusion. I simply would not be in the position I am today, drawing on my experience as a former staffer, if not for Congressman Al Green, and his former Chief of Staff, the late Jacqueline Ellis. For them to both take a chance on a then-young Korean American adoptee, give him the chance to make mistakes, learn, and eventually build a skill set that served not only the constituents of the 9<sup>th</sup> District of Texas, but now the national AAPI community, is a remarkable and humbling thing. Congressman Green’s office has consistently provided opportunities to men and women of color, which illustrates that greater diversity and inclusion on Capitol Hill is absolutely possible—but it requires practice more than rhetoric.

**Recruitment of Diverse Staff**

The educational arms of the Tri-Caucus provide all the evidence needed to make the argument that Congress, as an institution, should explore ways to invest in creating more on-ramps for young people of color to work in Congressional offices. Years ago, I was lucky enough to be selected as a Fellow with the Asian Pacific American Institute for Congressional Studies (APAICS), which is the sister organization to the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation and the Congressional Hispanic Caucus Institute. Countless staffers of color can trace their starts to one of these organizations, and many of them have become long-time staffers—and/or mentors to current staffers. These pipelines could be scaled if Congress itself were to commit resources to building them as well.

*Increase or create MRA supplement/increase to support individual office intern programs*

Within the last few years, Congress increased Members’ Representational Allowances (MRAs) to account for increased security concerns. This is an entirely legitimate purpose—why not do the same so that offices can recruit diverse intern candidates to work in their offices? This could serve a dual purpose of both building a pipeline of new talent on Capitol Hill, but also allow individual



offices to identify and cultivate talent from their respective districts or states. These funds should be used solely for this purpose and should be protected against manipulation by offices who might seek to simply use it as a revenue infusion.

*Build relationships with Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander Serving Institutions (AANAPISIs)*

As Congressional diversity initiatives consider building partnerships with minority serving institutions (MSIs), it is crucial that AANAPISIs are not excluded. AANAPISIs make up a small percentage of institutions of higher education; however, they enroll over 40 percent of the AAPI undergraduate student population. Member offices should be encouraged to connect with AANAPISIs in their respective districts or states as well.

**Empowering and Retaining Staff**

When I became Chief of Staff, there might have been five AAPI Chiefs in the House. When I left, there were around nine. While this was welcomed progress; many of my recent conversations with AAPI staffers, who would certainly qualify for consideration for senior staff positions, are far too often about how do they gracefully exit. My observations have been that many of these staffers are already burnt out, or become burnt out trying to make the case that they are ready to take on coveted senior roles.

To be very clear, I firmly believe that working in Congress is a privilege; and we should not rush individuals into leadership roles until they are ready. However, I also believe that the majority of staffers of color who choose this profession, do so because they are driven by a desire to better their communities. These are the staffers we should want to keep and uplift—and there are a number of changes or improvements that Congress could make towards this end.

*Staff diversity transparency*

While hearings like this are encouraging, Congress should be bold in acknowledging that diversity and inclusion efforts to date, are still coming up short. Institution-wide reporting should no longer be reliant upon third-party nonprofit organizations. This is critical transparency, and there should be no reason that Congress itself cannot commit resources to report on its own diversity.

Reporting should also occur on an individual office and committee level as well. Light should be shone to expose and encourage more meaningful commitments to inclusion. To put this into context, up until recently, the Congressional Management Foundation awarded the “Golden Mouse” for offices with the best websites, which I know many offices took seriously in the name of constituent accessibility. Surely, staff diversity would be an equally important objective for every Member.

*Staff salaries and MRA usage*

While I can appreciate as much as anyone, the importance of attempting to keep public service as a grounded profession, staff salaries should be low on the list of factors driving any disconnect between Congress and the public.

A standard exist survey for staffers could actually be quite useful to determine staffers' attitudes and views of the work environment. But even without it, I suspect that many would agree that one of the leading reasons for staffers leaving the Hill is because of the lack of reasonable pay. For this reason, Congress should institute a minimum total salary floor on spending for offices and committees. Alternatively, Congress could consider adopting a "use it or lose it" principle on the staff salary side of MRAs. Every office should have the right to exercise fiscal discipline, it just shouldn't come at the expense of staff who face very real challenges meeting the cost of living in Washington, DC.

Speaking as a former hiring manager, the lack of pay transparency would help many offices, and should be an easy fix for Congress. Chiefs of Staff and Members should be able to have pay per position data readily available, so that they can make informed decisions about setting salaries for their own offices. Returning to an earlier point, Congress could take this one step further and set a minimum pay standard for various office roles in both DC and district offices.

#### *Support staff community spaces*

When I first began on the Hill, there were only a handful of AAPI staffers—so few that when you crossed paths with another in the halls or in the cafeterias, a simple nod was enough to communicate the shared struggle of being one of the few representatives of your community. Community, for staffers of color, is crucial for long-term success and sustainability.

Spaces like the Congressional Asian Pacific American Staff Association (CAPASA) will create themselves in the absence of institutional support, but that doesn't mean that they should. A community support system is crucial to thriving on the Hill. There is a painful and telling irony that underpaid staffers must currently fund and support these spaces themselves. Congress could easily provide a modest amount of funding to staff organizations, which would result in far more resources than they could generate otherwise.

These community spaces also serve an important function of connecting junior staff with potential mentors. Of all the things I enjoyed about my time working in Congress, it is the mentoring opportunities that I miss the most. Capitol Hill is such a remarkable place to work, with boundless learning opportunities, but it can be incredibly lonely without a support network. Many AAPI staffers, are exposed to microaggressions that can make our experience even more isolating. Some elicit amusement, while others sting a much more.

For example, most AAPI staffers will groan and laugh with one another when they are mistaken for each other—or even a Member of Congress. It speaks to a relatively minor transgression, but one that happens far too often in broader society as well. On the other hand, I will never forget riding in an elevator during protests over the Affordable Care Act and being told by a protester that they "couldn't believe they let foreigners work in Congress."

I've shared this experience with many of the young staffers of color I've met with when they express frustration or concern about how alienated they feel working in Congress. I can only imagine how AAPI staffers have felt over the last year, navigating the COVID-19 pandemic. As staff, we are taught to take verbal punishment with grace in service to constituents, but the anti-

Asian rhetoric that has been politicized must carry weight for many of them. If not for themselves, then for their fear for parents, grandparents or elders who have become targets for violence and hate.

While I believe Congress should do more to support staff of color, I do not want my remarks to be construed as equating the creation of safe space for the sake of identity politics. Staffers of color are as resilient as they are brilliant. To choose to work in a space, surrounded by every day reminders that “you don’t belong”—and to then use those reminders as motivation to work harder—is precisely why Congress should be doing everything it can to promote greater diversity, equity and inclusion. So many of us watched our families or community struggle and want to make government work better for them. Washington, DC could use more of that these days.

It is a privilege to work in Congress, but it shouldn’t be exclusive to those who are privileged. I hope Congress continues to work with this spirit in mind.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I look forward to answering any questions.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Mr. Orton.

And our final witness is Maria Meier. Ms. Meier is a former senior leadership staffer and served as director of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus, as well as the Senate Democratic Diversity Initiative.

In 2017, she founded her own practice where she helps clients build inclusive environments. Her newest venture, We Are The People, is a community of support and training for underrepresented voices in public service.

Over the past decade, Ms. Meier has counseled over 1,500 individuals nationally and abroad on career and personal development and has spoken to hundreds of others on issues related to diversity, U.S. politics, and public service.

Ms. Meier, you are now recognized for 5 minutes.

#### **STATEMENT OF MARIA MEIER**

Ms. MEIER. Good morning Chair Kilmer, Vice Chair Timmons, and members of the committee. Thank you for the opportunity to participate in today's hearing along with this panel of esteemed leaders who, as I am, are committed to promoting diversity and building inclusion in Congress and throughout the public sector. And I do want to associate myself with all of the comments previously given, that they were brilliant, and I appreciate their willingness to share their experiences.

The perspectives I offer today come from having spent a dozen years working in both the House and Senate in positions ranging from answering phones to serving as a senior staffer in leadership offices. But it was during my last job on the Hill, where I led the Senate Democratic Diversity Initiative, that I had the opportunity to look at how to connect the multitude of dots that are necessary to create a truly diverse, inclusive, and well-trained talent force on the Hill.

Drawing from my experiences, I recently launched a social enterprise called We Are The People. We work to strengthen our democracy by supporting those who are within our institutions shaping and impacting policy. We do this through developing relevant and common training for staff, creating sustainable inclusion plans for the organization, and promoting careers in public service, particularly for diverse professionals.

There is a saying that institutions are only as strong as the people who run them, and Congress is no exception. The makeup of current and future workforces is not an ancillary issue but integral to how well you, the Members, are able to do your jobs.

Last year, I coauthored a guide for Congress and their hiring managers on how to have a more diverse staff. We sought to offer actionable and relevant advice that spoke to the very unique work environment that is the Hill. As a first step, our guiding encouraged managers to be intentional with regards to developing a diversity plan, by having a clear understanding as to what the office even means by diversity.

I recognize that there is a lot of discussion about this issue and about the various types that diversity can exist, be it gender, age, military service, or socioeconomic background, among many other points of identity, and I wholeheartedly support any office's delib-

erate and intentional outreach to job candidates that reflect underrepresented voices and perspectives. However, I do want to be clear and stress that these efforts cannot cloud the issues that the largest racial and ethnic groups in this country are still underrepresented at the staff level in Congress, particularly in senior level positions. This lack of representation in turn has real implications on how Congress develops meaningful legislation and policies.

Looking at the recommendations that your committee has put forward, I believe that there are some areas in particular that can be expanded to help ensure that staff and Members have the tools necessary to successfully create a diverse and inclusive working environment. Change begins at the top, and for this reason, I support your proposal for new Member orientation to be more comprehensive and nonpartisan. Add to this, I recommend that the training also address human resources issues. You, the Members, are in reality chief executive officers within your office. While you are not likely to manage staff day to day, you are the ones who set the tone and the culture for your staff who serve you.

Additionally, I would recommend that this training needs to include instructions on how offices can address issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion, not as a partisan issue but as an approach that helps members understand the role of diversity in creating better policy.

Secondly, the committee recommends boosting congressional capacity by providing more comprehensive training options for staff, including creating certifications and formal onboarding processes. Here too I support this recommendation and propose the creation of a certification program for all chiefs of staff, staff directors, and anyone who manages staff. This program can be completed over the course of a Congress and include a set of core competencies that will benefit all functions to the office. I believe also that learning how to write a diversity plan and how to manage diverse staff is a critical skill set for all managers and should be part of this instruction.

Finally, expanding training budgets and training opportunities is critical, not just to recruitment but to staff retention. A recent survey in the tech sector found that 94 percent of employees would stay in their current role longer if they felt that the organization invested in their professional development. I believe if we surveyed staff on the Hill, the numbers would be equally high. Providing professional development opportunities is not an investment in the individual employee alone; it is an investment in the level of service that you are delivering to your constituents.

Again, thank you for this opportunity to voice my support for your committee's efforts to look for ways Congress can expand the capacity of its staff as a means of developing the future diverse and inclusive workforce that serve the American people. And I welcome your questions.

[The statement of Ms. Meier follows:]

Testimony of

**Maria Robles Meier**

**Founder of We Are The People,  
Co-author of *Building and Maintaining a Diverse and Inclusive  
Congressional Office – An Introductory Guide for  
Congressional Staff and Leadership*, and  
Former Director of the Senate Democratic Diversity Initiative**

**Before the Select Committee on the Modernization of Congress  
Hearing on “Recruiting, Empowering and Retaining  
a Diverse Congressional Staff”  
May 13, 2021**

Chair Kilmer, Vice-Chair Timmons, and Members of the Committee, thank you for the invitation to appear at today’s hearing to share my thoughts and recommendations on promoting staff diversity within Congressional offices. I also want to express my thanks to the Committee staff for their dedicated service and assistance throughout this process.

I believe I was invited today because of the combination of my past experience as a Hill staffer and my current professional focus on training diverse public service professionals to be more skilled and empowered leaders. Having the opportunity to serve as a Congressional staffer was the highlight of my career. I am also grateful that it led me to yet a new way of being able to continue my service by helping to develop the next generation of public sector staffers.

Last year, I was honored to be invited to participate in a discussion this Committee hosted on building internal expertise in Congress. In the remarks I shared, I encouraged the Committee to continue its focus on examining how Congress invests in one of its greatest resources – the staff who serve in the wide range of positions that enable you to function daily. My voice was by no means the only one on this issue, and as I have continued to follow your Committee’s work, I have been heartened to see your ongoing attention to creating a better and expanded infrastructure for Congressional staff to operate in.

Throughout these hearings, you have heard from a myriad of speakers and expert witnesses who each bring their own unique perspectives on how best to modernize Congress. While it may not be explicit, I do believe there is a common theme that runs through our remarks and recommendations. We, I believe, share a belief in the institution of Congress as well as our commitment to supporting it and the people who contribute to maintaining and strengthening our democracy.

There is a saying that institutions are only as strong as the people who run them. Congress is no exception. While you, the Members, are clearly the faces and voices of the American people within our structure of government, I believe that you will agree, your staff make it possible for you to enact the vision you set before those who sent you to office. The makeup of current and

future workforces is not an ancillary issue but integral to how well Congress does or does not function.

Recently, I launched a social enterprise called We Are The People. I derived its name from the opening words of the Preamble to the Constitution, “We the People of the United States in order to form a more perfect union.” While I may not look like what our founding fathers had in mind, I do believe that those who have committed to public service are the people who will help our Union be more responsive to and representative of all who make up our great country.

The idea for this effort came from a dozen years spent on Capitol Hill working in a range of positions from my first job answering phones to serving as a senior staffer in leadership offices. Additionally, I spent nearly a decade more in other public service positions. It was during my last job on the Hill where I served as director of the Senate Democratic Diversity Initiative for nearly six years, that I had the opportunity to look at how to connect the multitude of dots that are necessary to create a truly diverse, inclusive, and well-trained talent force in Congressional offices.

We Are The People supports our democratic process by training and building the leadership capacity of those who work within our institutions impacting policy and politics. We do this through developing relevant empowerment trainings for staff; creating sustainable inclusion plans for institutions and organizations; and promoting careers in public service particularly for diverse professionals.

This is not simply a theoretical approach. I have trained Congressional staff enough to see the results of the benefits of providing the support and tools for them to become more successful in their positions and service to their offices.

Last year along with Laura Maristany, another former Congressional staffer, and under the auspice of Representative Democracy, a coalition that recognizes the strength of diversity to our institutions of government, I co-authored a guide to provide specific and actionable advice to hiring managers in House and Senate offices on how to have a more diverse staff and an office that fosters an environment of inclusion and ultimately build a working environment that promotes the concept of belonging. We started the process with the underlying belief that this was a worthy and important goal for “the people’s house”.

As a first step, our guide encourages managers to “be intentional” with regards to developing a diversity plan. By that, we mean for the Member and Chief of Staff to be on the same page as to what the office means by diversity. I recognize that there is a lot of discussion about the different types of diversity that exist be it gender, age, military service, or socio-economic background among other experiences or points of identity. I wholeheartedly support any office’s deliberate and intentional outreach to job candidates that reflect underrepresented voices, however, I want to stress that these efforts cannot cloud the issue that the largest racial and ethnic groups in this country are still underrepresented at the staff level in Congress particularly in senior level positions. This lack of representation, in turn, has real implications when creating national policy.

Here, I would like to add a side note. Building true inclusion involves creating offices and talent forces that also are welcoming and accommodating of those with disabilities. This is not my area of expertise, but there are many who are leading the advocacy and awareness needed to make workplaces accessible for all, and I would encourage this Committee to look at the issues of disability staffing.

In the private sector, human resource professionals regard diversity as merely the first step of an ongoing process of creating and nurturing inclusive talent forces. While it is easy to focus on resume searches as the main component of a diversity hiring strategy, this approach alone will not lead to real and sustained results. To make the process successful requires it to be holistic approach that in addition to recruitment includes a plan for training, retaining, and promoting staff through the ranks.

Hiring, onboarding, and managing a staff in a very demanding and fast-paced work environment is a challenge to even the most talented and seasoned managers. For those who are new to the positions these tasks may seem like overwhelming additions to an already unsurmountable to-do list. While I believe our guide can be a very helpful tool, it alone is not enough to equip managers with the skills and know-how to build well-functioning and inclusive offices.

Change begins at the top, and thus, I support the Committee's proposal for new-Member orientation to be more comprehensive and nonpartisan. To it, I add my recommendation that this training formally include addressing human resource issues to help Members understand their role as chief executives within their offices. While understandably, Members of Congress usually are not involved in the day-to-day management of staff, they are, in fact, the ones who set the tone for the office culture and the staff who serve them. Additionally, I strongly recommend that this training include addressing how offices can address issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion, not as a partisan issue, but as an approach that helps Members better serve their constituents.

Secondly, the Committee has made recommendations to boost Congressional capacity by providing more comprehensive training options for staff including creating certifications and a formal onboarding process.

Again, I support these recommendations and propose an expansion of them to include a formal structured training for all chiefs of staff, staff directors, and any others who manage staff. A managerial certification program that can be completed over the course of one Congress will have positive ripple effects on how well an office functions. Here, too, I would add that all the training must address how build and manage a diverse staff as a critical skill for managers to attain.

While the civil service program does not offer parallels for all staffing issues on the Hill, I believe the Candidate Training Program which prepares professionals to enter federal managerial positions through Senior Executive Service can provide some guidance. Among the core competencies they prepare future managers for is "Leading Change", "Leading People", and "Building Coalitions" which are all applicable to the requirements of senior Hill staff.



Finally, expanding training budgets and training opportunities is critical not just to recruitment but equally important staff training. A recent survey by an online community supporting career development in the tech sector found that “94% of employees would stay in their current role longer if they felt the organization invested in their professional development.” The private sector findings may not be identical for the Hill, but I believe, if asked, Congressional staff would voice their strong support for expanded training. It is simply more effective to retain and promote staff whenever possible. Providing professional development opportunities is an investment, not just in the individual, but in the level of service they deliver to constituents.

Again, thank you for this opportunity to voice my support for your Committee’s efforts to look for ways Congress can expand the capacity of its staff as a means of developing the future workforce that will serve you the Members and the American people. Intertwined with each of the issues you are addressing is the need to create both policies and processes to ensure that those who are afforded the opportunity to serve as Congressional staff are reflective of who we are as a nation.

Many of us are called to public service by the needs we see in our communities, creating a welcoming environment to harness that desire and talent will enable you, our elected representatives, to create a more perfect union for all.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Ms. Meier.

And thanks to all of our witnesses for your terrific testimony.

We will now give our committee members an opportunity to ask those questions, and I will start by recognizing myself for 5 minutes.

Let me start, Ms. Hendrix, with you. You know, we currently rely a lot on outside groups to do our diversity analysis, and even your recent reporting is just a snapshot in time. Give me your sense, would it be feasible to collect and track more data on the diversity of our staffers as we onboard them? Is that something that would be helpful? Give us some guidance there.

Ms. HENDRIX. Yes, I do believe it is feasible to collect that data at onboarding, use as an example, the Federal Government uses a standard form at the point of onboarding to collect some of that information at that point. In that way, we could—the information that we do as a survey could be collected and completed and updated at regular intervals. Rather than doing it as a snapshot at one point in time during the year, it could be updated regularly. For example, we plan to do a compensation study that will be a snapshot of a point in time at one point in the year. I believe we will collect that information in July of this year. Rather than collecting it at that one point of that workforce in that singular month of that year, we could update it throughout that year because we plan to move—rather than doing a static report, we plan to do a digital manipulation of that. We could update—if we do that, we could do it over time and collect it and update that regularly. Rather than doing it as a one snapshot of the time, it could be updated regularly.

The CHAIRMAN. I appreciate that.

Ms. Meier, you talked about the importance of leadership at the top, and I appreciated that. I want to get your sense of how Members who are often not involved in their office's day-to-day operations can do better, can encourage and to help ensure that their teams are enacting their values in the office when it comes to diversity. And specifically if you have guidance for us as to recommendations this committee could make to try to enhance that, I am very open to your suggestions.

Ms. MEIER. Yes. Thank you for the question.

And I do believe it is important, and it is absolutely understandable that Members have schedules that they don't need one more thing to do, but that they do recognize their role in setting this tone and the culture of the office. And it is important for the chiefs of staff to know that they are in sync with their Members as well.

That is why I recommend integrate diversity/human resources training not just for new Members but also every time you have your retreats at the caucus level, periodic speakers when you have your weekly caucus meetings. Again, it is introducing the concept of how you identify this, and they can provide very specific, easy actionable things to do, like sitting down with the chief of staff and writing a simple statement as to what your office values are, your mission statement that includes how you reach out to the diverse constituencies that you represent. Again, this is not to add extra to-do's and tasks, but it is to include you and implement and chiefs

of staff and all the staff can manifest your values as to what you want to see and how you want to serve your constituents.

The CHAIRMAN. I think that is really helpful. And I think it is important for us not to look at this as extra work. This is the work, right? Having an environment where people want to work and where we have a diverse workforce, that is the work.

So let me ask, Mr. Orton, do you feel that the AAPI community is sometimes overlooked in the diversity discussion? And, if so, you know, what do you think about a recommendation that congressionally funded reports actually include data disaggregation with regards to the AAPI community?

Mr. ORTON. I appreciate the question, and I think it is spot on, not just within the context of staff diversity but more broadly speaking in the public sector.

We found that many times Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders are just not a part of people's calculus when they are talking about communities of color, and that is something that has been a bit baffling. I think it is driven by, again, misperceptions about sort of this widespread belief that Asian Americans are successful and, you know, don't require the same kind of consideration as other communities of color, and I think that is a mistake because the Asian American, Pacific Islander community is widely diverse, has a huge range of different lived experiences, different immigration experiences, and that has to be captured if we are really going to lead into this diversity, equity, and inclusion conversation.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Let me recognize Vice Chair Timmons.

Mr. TIMMONS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And I want to thank all of the witnesses for taking their time. This is very important, and we just appreciate all of your input.

I want to start with objective. So, in my mind, our objective should be that every Member's office—well, let's start with Congress. Congress should be representative of the country, and then within Congress, every Member's office should be representative of the people they represent. So it should be diverse based off of race, gender, geography, socioeconomic background, lifestyle, and it should be proportional based off of the population they represent.

Can we start there? Do we all—I want to open that up to comment. Do we have any—is that accurate? Are we on the same page there? Is that the objective?

Anyone?

Ms. AUSTIN REED. Congressman, thank you for the question.

I do think it is a strong objective to have a workforce that looks like America. I wouldn't limit it to exact proportionality, is not currently, and I think we have got so far to go before we set that as a standard. I think we need to develop—as the chairman said, it is not side work; it is the work. And we have got to inject diversity into the DNA of our office. And I think if we start to look at if, you know, a State's population is a majority White and Black staff cannot or staff of color can't work in that office because we are focused on the proportionality, I think that limits the work product of the office.

I think your goals of diversifying the Congress and the staff of Congress are spot on. I would just approach it a bit differently.

Mr. TIMMONS. But would we benchmark success as making it representative? I mean, is the definition—is our success—my own thing is that it should be proportional. So, if there is a decision about—well, not decision. An office should—

Ms. HENDRIX. May I?

Mr. TIMMONS. Go ahead.

Ms. HENDRIX. As a minimum benchmark, that would be great. But if that were our minimum benchmark and that would be success, we are not there yet based on the data that we collected for the House, if we wanted to set that as a baseline benchmark and to say that we could reach that and that be a success as a benchmark, based on the data that we have collected from our 2019 compensation and diversity study that we did for the House. And I want to state that as a caveat that we only collected information for about 50 percent of our workforce, and that was a survey, and it wasn't done with having 100 percent of our workforce represented. And so I state that as a caveat.

Having said that, though, with those caveats included, if we use that as a representative workforce and data scientists state having a 50-percent representation does give you a good sampling size, we are not there.

Mr. TIMMONS. I couldn't agree more, we are definitely not there. And that is why we are having this hearing and that is what our goal is. I just want to make sure that we begin with the objectives.

So, next, internships. We have talked a lot about internships as an onboarding access to the Hill. Can we all agree that that is a place that we should focus in addition to recruitment for staff? But should we put an oversized effort on to internships as a way to give additional access?

Ms. HENDRIX. I would think that what we are seeing now is that we see a—data reflects that we do not see in the senior roles a representation of leadership. And what data supports is that when you don't have a pipeline of people in the senior roles, it is really difficult to create a pipeline of people continuing to flow in the senior roles. If you don't have a bench, if you don't have people that are to raise people into those senior roles, starting with interns, it is very hard to continually push people up because it really does start with the leadership. So thinking of, yes, internships but also fellowships and subject-matter expertise. It takes years and years to just start with the internships. It should be, yes, internships and professional development and fellowships. So, yes, internships, but you should think that and other things that will increase the pipeline at the top and the middle.

So it should be both really. It can't just start at the bottom thinking that an internship pipeline is going to increase the level of senior leaders who are going to be able to affect policy decisions and affect being able to grow and develop future leaders because what we are seeing right now is the current leadership isn't there to develop those future leaders. It is really important to create people who can grow the leaders right now, and we don't have as many of those right now. And a lot of that leadership, and speaking currently, we have lost, we have lost four cycles of leadership because of the pandemic and the situation we are in right now. So, even the people we have in place, we have to think of—

Mr. TIMMONS. I ran out of time. I ran out of time. I am sorry. I totally agree with you it is an all-of-the-above approach, and I will do whatever I can to help.

And, Mr. CHAIRMAN, thank you. I will yield back.

The Chairman. Thank you.

Next, up we have Ms. Williams, and then in the on-deck circle, we have Mr. Latta.

Ms. WILLIAMS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And, Vice Chair Timmons, I agree with you. This is an all—it is not an either/or approach. We have to make sure that we are focusing on both. So thank you for those questions because we know that to build a diverse workforce on Capitol Hill, we need to be sure that our career opportunities are visible to talented people, and that includes people without DC connections. Some industries base their hiring around recruiting and even interviewing college students on campuses across the country. These industries bring some of the best and brightest into their fold before they even graduate. And, Congress, we need to think about ways to broader cast our net for recruitment.

Ms. Hendrix, your testimony referenced the Office of Diversity and Inclusion's partnership with colleges and universities. How can the House's resource offices leverage these partnerships to equip educational institutions with the information and resources they need to help their diverse graduates consider a career in Congress?

Ms. HENDRIX. We lay the groundwork, but we are one office. We are one office. So we are laying groundwork now. We are planting seeds. I think it is important to think of how we grow that outward. It can't just be us.

So there are programs that are adjacent to ours, but we really want to make sure that we are developing long-term internship and fellowship programs that bring people here, that provide both exposure and long-term experiences for people to transition into long-term employment and how we are going to create a long-term pipeline that is sustainable for increasing our pipeline for long-term growth in employment.

Ms. WILLIAMS. Thank you, Ms. Hendrix.

Ms. Reed, in your testimony, you mentioned the need for Congress to recruit from a variety of schools, including HCBUs and community colleges. In what ways could congressional hiring be more transparent and accessible to ensure that diverse early career Hill applicants without DC connections feel confident navigating the process and putting forth the competitive candidacy?

Ms. AUSTIN REED. Thank you so much, Congresswoman, for that question.

I think we have to treat hiring like we do in other industries and handle it professionally. We have to hire recruiters whose job it is to go to college campuses and inform them about Hill opportunities. I certainly, when I was in college and high school, knew nothing about working in Congress. It was happenstance that I got here. But I think if we have staff who are focused on—their sole job is to go and recruit talent from every corner of this country, I think that we can get a broader and more representative workforce, and that includes minority-serving institutions, HCBUs, community colleges.

Ms. WILLIAMS. And, Ms. Reed, maybe this is me as a new Member trying to figure this all out, but each office hires their own staff. So I am curious as to what that would look like for recruitment into individual offices?

Ms. AUSTIN REED. Yes, that is a great question.

I think that the office that Kemba leads is a great conduit. Right now what is happening is when you put out a listing, we send it—we take your listing, and we try to amplify it. The Black Women's Congressional Alliance has a Google listserv, and we try to ping all of our networks. Kemba is in touch with candidates that she has done interviews with and trained them to interview for your office. I think if the recruiters were in her office and finding that talent, then we could suggest to you when you are hiring, give you a slate of qualified, prepared candidates who are diverse to enter in your office. So it takes the burden off of your chief, your LDL, your hiring managers whose primary goal is to serve their constituents and put some of the burden on Congress to help give you a diverse staff that you wouldn't otherwise get who are beyond the beltway.

Ms. WILLIAMS. Thank you so much.

And, Ms. Meier, if we both draw our pipeline from diverse educational institutions across the country to Congress, how would that help ensure that congressional staff workforce represents the diversity of our districts?

Ms. MEIER. Thank you for the question, Congresswoman.

It is going to build the pipeline, and I believe, as Ms. Reed stated, many of us fell into these positions because we didn't know that they existed, that working for Congress was a thing. So awareness is really critical.

If I might use a brief example, I worked in an office that did not have an HBCU in their State, but they were committed to having a representational workforce. So they created a specific intern program named after a civil rights leader from their home State and then worked with the community to go out in turn and recruit diverse candidates to apply for the internship.

Building that community connection again can broaden your outreach and build that pipeline. It is a first step. But that is why we have all addressed the multitude of issues and the overlaying. Once staff is here, do they seek people who like them? Do they have support of networks? These congressional staff associations are so important to provide the staff with a sense of welcoming and a place to go when they are struggling with professional issues or personal issues. Excuse me. And—

Ms. WILLIAMS. Ms. Meier, thank you for your comments. I am going to have to follow up with you later because my time has expired, and I do not want to get into another member's time for questions.

Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. Mr. Latta, let me ask you, I know Mr. Davis has to hop off in a minute. Do you mind letting him go ahead of you? Is that all right, or do you have to jump too?

Mr. LATTA. Can I think about that? I yield to my good friend, Rodney.

The CHAIRMAN. Go ahead, Mr. Davis.

Mr. DAVIS. Thank you, Mr. Kilmer.

And thank you, Mr. Latta, for giving me your 5 minutes and mine, so just go ahead and run the clock up to 10.

Hey—Perlmutter, I will take yours too.

Hey, I really appreciate the group here, and I really appreciate the discussion, and I can tell you, as somebody who started as a staffer, this institution means a great deal to all of us, and we want to see the diversity in this institution continue to grow. I mean, when I started in 1997, nobody paid interns. Now we have got paid intern programs. We have got opportunities to bring people from every socioeconomic strata to Washington, DC, and, you know, to work in our district offices too. That is where I worked. And we wanted to make sure and we still need to do a better job of making sure diversity and inclusion matters at the district office level too.

But I will tell you, as somebody who now has been here 8.5 years as a Member, 16 years as a staffer, we have had a wide variety of very diverse employees in and out of our offices. And here is the good news. The good news is that some of our most diverse employees have gone on to better and brighter jobs. Because of the work that they were doing in our office to such a high standard, they were able to move into something that they wanted to do beyond their current positions that we weren't able to fulfill within ours. I think that is a good sign.

Here is my concern, though. And, Ms. Hendrix, ODI may have the statistics. What is the partisan breakdown of diversity? Because I think it is important for us as Republicans to realize that, while it may be lower on our side, if you have those statistics, what can we do, in your opinion, to help encourage more conservative Republican diverse employees to come out here? And what can we do to work with your office to help make that better and make it more accessible for all folks who are interested in working for even our side too?

Ms. HENDRIX. I appreciate the question, Mr. Davis.

The data collection we have done has not broken down the data by party. In some ways, that was intentional because it would have been harder to get people to agree to data collection because people believe that it would reflect on them negatively. We wanted to be able to collect the most robust information. We have not done it and divided it by party. Especially when you think of our offices are so small and the information is collected anonymously, we have not even broken the information down by Member or Member office. Our staffs are just so small, unlike the data that is collected by Senate offices because Senate offices are much, much larger. Some of our offices, if you break it down by staff or individual staff, some staffs have just a small staff of maybe five or six to seven people, depending on the time of the year that you take the data collection.

So we have collected the data of the House as a body rather than as an individual staffer of an individual Member office. So we have not disaggregated it by party or by member office or by individual committee. So I would not be able to provide that information for you. I do apologize.

Mr. DAVIS. No worries. I mean, I can just tell you just from our own perspective, the pool of applicants and diversity within those

applicants has a lot less to do with race and more to do with gender and other issues, and that is a concern that I have. And I guess my question to anybody who wants to answer, what can we do to increase the applicants for internships, the applicants for jobs, the applicants of a more diverse nature that would want to come work for more conservative Republicans? Because we know—I mean, I am only speaking from my experience in the hiring process, I know it is a little more difficult to get people to apply. And I want your suggestions on what we can do better.

Ms. HENDRIX. And what I will do, speaking—taking liberty to speak on behalf of my deputy director, who I work very close with, Mr. Castro, we do a lot of work with the college and university program and the Republican resume bank. They are working very hard and very diligently and are seeing a lot of success both in placements and both in intake through the resume bank just in the same way that you've seen success in the intake in our resume bank and in placements. So I would say we don't see diversity as a one-party issue. We are a bipartisan office. We are working not to seek increase in diversity by party. We are seeking to increase diversity for the House. So we are really working to work at this in a bipartisan and collaborative effort.

Mr. DAVIS. And I am glad you are. I am out of time. I appreciate that. That is all of our goals. But if there is a deficiency in applicants on one side, we would look forward to working with you and Mr. Castro to help fix that.

So I yield back. Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Mr. Latta, and thanks for nothing, Perlmutter.

The CHAIRMAN. Next up, because he was here at the gavel, we will go to Mr. Latta and then, after him, Mr. Perlmutter.

Mr. LATTA. Well, thank you, Mr. Chair.

And, to our vice chair, and to our witnesses today, thanks for being here today, really informative.

And, you know, not to go back on some of the things that have already discussed, but I think it is really important because, again, you know, we heard—I heard the term “pipeline” used several times by our witnesses this morning. And how do we—you know, I know that we want to make sure that we are getting more people in these senior positions. A lot of times we have to lay that groundwork.

And I was privileged to serve in our legislature in Ohio for 11 years in the Senate and the House, and we have what we call the Legislative Service Commission in Ohio, which I think is probably one of the best in the State. We have a 13-month program where they accept about 40 students from around the country to really in-depth get to know every part of Ohio and the way it operates in the government. And I was fortunate in the Senate to always have an LSC intern in my office, and it is such a great proving ground for them because after 13 months—and plus it is paid—they were highly sought after, not only in the legislature but across the country, for what they were able to do, and also from all the different companies in Ohio because of the training that they received.

And so, before I start asking some questions, I wanted to lay that groundwork. But also with the universities and colleges—and I know we have been talking about that and it was also asked by



some of our members—that, you know, I know that Miami of Ohio, they have a program, you know, that they have students that come here to Washington, and then they place them in offices. And I think it is really important that we reach out across the country. In the State of Ohio, I would always say, why am I only getting students from certain areas or certain colleges? And so then we would literally just try to get as much information out because Ohio has a slew of colleges and universities. I think we are number four or five in the country with the number of schools that we have. But I really wanted to make sure that we are bringing people in that want to have a certain talent. It wasn't always that they had a political science background or something like that. We had computer science majors and everybody else that participated in these programs.

So I want to just kind of ask, just going across with all of our witness today, what—Mr. Orton, if you could start, you know, what has been the experience of going across the country to really reach out, you know, in the 50 States, the District of Columbia, going out there and trying to pull these students from these schools and telling them there is opportunity here in Washington? And we really want that, you know, that knowledge of those students to come here. And then also maybe reaching out to the State Legislatures across the country, if they have some training programs that we could also utilize.

So, Mr. Orton, if you would like to start.

Mr. ORTON. Sure. Thank you, Congressman.

And, honestly, I think you have laid out a framework that the Select Committee really ought to think about. All of the places you just identified are certainly kind of areas where a more diverse and broad pool of applicants could be cultivated. But the reality is that the programs that actually do the work of finding students or prospective staffers seems to be fairly relegated to a couple of organizations. And I guess for me it would be saying, can Congress change the game a little bit? Can you commit resources to actually build the kind of program that you are talking about, either through ODI or elsewhere?

I think all of us would agree that the universities, at least my experience has certainly been, that there are plenty of students of different political affiliations that have interests, but they just simply don't know where to start when trying to sort of crack this code of gaining entry or an opportunity in Congress.

And so my hope is that Congress itself would actually commit real resources to building the kind of programs that you are talking about.

Mr. LATTA. Ms. Meier.

I think you are on mute. There we go.

Ms. MEIER. Okay. I apologize. Thank you.

Mr. LATTA. No. That is fine.

Ms. MEIER. Yes, I think everything you said is spot on. There are, in fact, a number of organizations; they are nonprofits, so they recruit both Democratic and Republican students, recent graduates, and current students to come to DC for a period of time. And they focus on diversity, APAICS in the Asian Pacific community, CHCI in the Latino community, the Congressional Black Caucus Founda-

tion, and they are always looking to expand and to build their connections with new offices.

When I was in the diversity initiative, I worked hard to get them to build connections in Senate offices because they traditionally had placed their students only in House offices. But it is important to give them more opportunities to serve because it, again, builds that pathway for students who come early to see this as a viable career and hopefully get them hooked on public service.

I am going to actually throw a better wrench in the conversation, and it addresses a couple of the other questions, and I will do this very briefly. And that is the traditional model has been to recruit students from internships and out of college. I mentioned human resources as an issue for Members to be more familiar with because understanding the trends of the future workforce is also important. Younger workers will be less likely to stay at a job for any long period of time. It is how they approach it. However, people are staying in the workforce for longer. So also looking at how you can draw diverse professionals who are farther along in their career. They don't have some of the basics you learn as an intern, but they are smart people. I have had numerous conversations with very successful professionals, people of color, who said: I always wanted to work in DC. I never had the money to move as an intern. I wish I had started. Is there a way to go back?

So looking at diversity in this manner too can also increase the number of people you recruit and bring in really talented diverse professionals to provide you service.

Mr. LATTA. Thank you very much.

Mr. Chairman, I know my time. I overran it, and I appreciate your indulgence. And I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Next up, Mr. Perlmutter.

Mr. PERLMUTTER. Thanks, Mr. Chair.

I guess I am kind of looking at this in sections. So we have sort of got the employees of the House. So the staff employees, so staff committee employee—committee staff folks, but then my personal office, and I am just—you know, and then there is new Members and then Members that have been here for a while.

So, for me, the way we have done it is I like to hire from my campaign, and I like to hire from within, and I like to—and folks come from my offices in Colorado to DC, and so, in my three top staff, you know, my chief of staff, who has been with me since the beginning, she was my campaign manager. The other two top have been with me for the whole time as well, which makes it hard to accomplish the things, Ms. Hendrix, you want to accomplish.

And so I am curious how I—I think what I have is a good cycle. I have got longevity, which is one of the goals of this committee is to have staff stability. Yet I am not able to plug in, you know, new faces, if you will, and new and additional diversity. It is all coming from my district.

So I don't know. I am just sort of at a—I feel a little perplexed by this. And I would open it up first to you, Ms. Hendrix, and then to the whole panel. I don't think I am that unusual in how I do my hiring. So, Ms. Hendrix, what do you suggest?

Ms. HENDRIX. I think the beauty of the House is that there is so much variance, but in variance, sometimes there is chaos. And so what I said is—what I would recommend is that you have to think about, because you know at the top there isn't going to be movement, you have to think about the future of your junior staff because you know your senior staff are going to stay intact. So you have to think—your particular staff is going to have to think about the future of your junior staffers, where they have to go in the future, and so think about training options, think about how to keep them engaged, think about how to think about their future and—

Mr. PERLMUTTER. So what—here is my question to you. If my approach is to hire from the campaign to the district office, from the district office to Washington, I mean, maybe that is what I have got to change because what I don't feel is a pool of applicants, if you will, in Colorado.

Ms. HENDRIX. Interestingly, I grew up in Colorado. So that could be part of your opportunity. Look at organizations within Colorado to think about recruiting for your campaign and think about developing the diversity of your campaign staff so it is not just in one place. You want to think about the diversity of all of those components. And really it is about outcomes on campaign. You are thinking about outcomes. How do you engage different communities to think about the outcome that you would like to yield in your election? And diversity is a component of that.

And so diversity isn't for diversity's sake. You really want to think about what your outcomes are, and diverse teams do that. That is what we are really talking about here. We are not—diversity is about business outcomes, is about audience outcomes, and that is what diverse groups and teams do. They yield better outcomes. And so that is what your recruiting metrics should be about. And it is about skill sets. It is about opportunities. It is about creating the needs that you would—the needs and opportunities you would like to yield, and that is what we are really talking about. It is not a Noah's Ark opportunity for metrics or opportunities. We are really talking about diversity so that you can engage the people that you need to for the opportunities you would like to create for your constituents, for the opportunities you would like to create for the people that you are serving. And so you need all of the ideals and opinions and—I am missing a word here. But you need all of those—

Mr. PERLMUTTER. No, no, no—

Ms. HENDRIX [continuing]. Things together to begin with.

Mr. PERLMUTTER. And so, for me, you know, that would be internships locally for sure. And I liked Representative Williams' suggestion, and we talked about it, of recruiting from college campuses. And it may be that I skip the campaign and go straight to the internships for the office, which we do a lot of that.

I will yield back. Thanks, Mr. Chair.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Mr. Perlmutter.

Next up, Mr. Cleaver.

Oops, I am sorry, Mr. Cleaver, we had you, and then we lost you.

MR. CLEAVER. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. You have got it.

Mr. CLEAVER. I would like to thank you and Mr. Timmons for bringing the subject up because I think it is critically important, and it is something that we probably avoid too much with intentionality. So this—I think this is important.

And I would like—and thank you for our panel, thank you. You guys are very smooth and clear with your comments.

And so I want to find out if you think this works out. Bill Clinton had a White House personnel director by the name of Bob Nash, who I will—from Little Rock, and I have known him for 30 years or maybe more. And he did something his first month in office after he appointed Bob. He went in and said to Bob in his office—and he said it in front of a lot of folk—he said: Bob, if anyone comes to me at all complaining about the lack of diversity, you are fired.

And, I mean, the people who were close in that administration will tell you that Bob Nash, who was a good guy, but, I mean, Bob Nash was constantly dealing with these issues of diversity. You know, he would call, you know, somebody and say: Hey, your department is not looking good. You need to do something. You need to do it fast.

So I am wondering if you guys think that is too much pressure or is that, you know, something that—in other words, if a Member said to somebody, whoever that somebody is, in their operation, “Hey, I want a diverse staff, and if I don’t get it, I am blaming you,” you know, is that too tough or—

Ms. AUSTIN REED. Congressman, I will take your question or at least I will start and turn it over to my colleagues to try.

I worked for some of your friends who challenged me pretty much that, that they expected that their staff be diverse, and I think as a chief of staff, what it meant was every single opening that my office had and every internship, fellowship, any way our office could externally engage, I had to challenge—I knew that my bosses, the Members, had a certain expectation that I had turned over every single rock.

And so I think, you know, we talked earlier about setting the tone starts at the top, so you as the Member making that the expectation really sets the culture for the office and can drive the decisionmaking for that chief and the rest of the staff. So I think it is a lot of pressure, but it certainly can make change.

Mr. ORTON. I would hop in on that as well.

I would agree. I think maybe I would encourage you also, Congressman—it is good to see you too, sir—to set a timeframe for your staff. Right? I don’t think this can happen necessarily in immediate turnaround, but if you set goals to Maria’s point about a diversity plan and sort of map that out what that can look like over the course of a Congress, over the course of however many years, that would provide some framework. I know that if I were a staffer with that sort of directive, I would feel a little more comfortable with.

And I would also encourage all members of the select committee to think about how every Member of Congress, you know, there are good times to stand out, and there are bad times to stand out. And I remember when everybody started bringing in Kindles and iPads. Right? And eventually everyone had to have one. In fact, I remember Congressman Perlmutter and Congressman Cleaver talking to

my former boss in the middle of hearings about this stuff. I think that kind of peer pressure works. I really do. So I would encourage folks to think about that as well.

Ms. MEIER. I would like to—I am sorry.

Mr. CLEAVER. Yes. Go ahead. Somebody was saying—

Ms. MEIER. With respect to hardworking chiefs of staff, accountability is what is going to yield results. But I would had to that layer, it is not just about hiring, but it is about retention and the promotion, so the full spectrum of the process.

Mr. CLEAVER. Yes. I appreciate your answers. If you know anybody from the Clinton administration, ask them who is Bob Nash. I mean, everybody, everybody would know him. And if they got a phone call and they said, “Mr. Nash is on the phone,” they would start trembling. And, I mean, he was—but, I mean, that is one way of doing it. But, you know, we are in a slightly different situation, you know, in Congress. But, nonetheless, we still have an issue.

Anyway, thank you, Mr. Chairman. I yield back the 1 second I have left.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Mr. Cleaver.

Next up, Mr. Phillips.

Mr. PHILLIPS. I had my audio on, not video.

Good morning, everybody. I joined a little bit late, so forgive me if I am covering some ground that has been already. But I think it is fair to say if we really want to expand the pipeline, we have got to pedal way further upstream than we do right now. I know there has been some conversation about accessing college students to introduce them to potential careers on the Hill, but can't we look at going a little further upstream? You know, how can we engage high school students? How can we expose the work of Congress in ways that perhaps isn't being attempted yet so that we can expand the pool of diversity?

And I would turn that question to anybody who might have some thoughts on it.

Ms. MEIER. I will go ahead and start. And thank you for the question.

It is a holistic and comprehensive approach. And I tried to do this in my remarks, and I do it in my work, and I stress it is, again, not diversity for diversity's sake. But it is the work to build inclusion, which in turn is just going to yield a better product and help you in the work that you do.

I cited an example of an office I worked in that created a community diversity civic leader task force that was able to reach out in ways that the office in DC couldn't. The district office had some relationships and were involved in the community, but they were extra sets of eyes and ears. So building those coalitions at the high school level to even introduce the concept is very critical. Again, you don't have to do any of this work yourself. There are organizations. There are organizations that bring high school students to DC. Building off of those and building those coalitions can help you take this to the next level of building inclusion.

And, again, I also recommend going the other direction, not just the younger entry level staff, but people already in their careers who might be open to making a career change and bring really valuable work experience.

Mr. PHILLIPS. Anybody else want to share a perspective on that? I not, if I might ask, you know, which organization, in your estimation, is doing the best work in high schools so that we might try to amplify and advocate for?

Ms. AUSTIN REED. Congressman Phillips, I will point to one example of my former boss, Congresswoman Frederica Wilson, who has the 5,000 Role Models of Excellence Project. It is in every elementary, middle, and high school in Florida, and it trains young men on all facets of civic education. And those are the types of programs that are integrated with their school programming that you can get to a young person early, tell them that they can be a legislative assistant in Congress, inform them about internships and pipeline them.

I think, you know, to your earlier question, we have to fund it. We have to make it programming, and someone has to be in charge of and accountable for this work. And I think, you know, we are innovative and smart enough to create that.

Mr. PHILLIPS. And that is called—I am sorry. And her program is called 5,000—

Ms. AUSTIN REED. It is called the 5,000 Role Models of Excellence Project, and I am happy to follow up with your staff to give you—

Mr. PHILLIPS. Yes, would love to learn more about that.

Just one followup question for all of you too. You know, Congress is woefully ill-equipped to train not just staffers but Members of Congress, and as a Member now just in my second term, amongst my many surprises is how poorly prepared new Members are for the work.

You know, how can Congress better offer boot camps, whether it be—well, Members as well, but for staff members and for those who might want to make a career change? You know, we don't have mechanisms to expose people to potential opportunities in other categories. Any thoughts on that, how we become a more intentional training institution?

Ms. MEIER. I will go ahead and start.

And, Congressman, in response briefly to your previous question, as soon as you asked it, I went blank. But I was going to recommend Close Up that brings high school students. They are a very comprehensive program.

Mr. PHILLIPS. Close Up?

Ms. MEIER. Close Up. And I can provide that information, contact information to your staff.

Mr. PHILLIPS. Thank you.

Ms. MEIER. They are ones that I know that also work hard on ensuring that they recruit a diverse body of students.

I mentioned in earlier comments that I do support your committee's recommendation to enhance new Member orientation, and I would say, you know, even expand that to yearly conference retreats that contain—bringing in speakers, trainers, partnering with management organizations, that bringing in a component of HR issues that also address and help Members understand the role of DEI. I know you have a lot on your plates, but building it into the system early on and annually can help that knowledge.

I also recommended in a certification program creating a management certification program for—

Mr. PHILLIPS. Yes.

Ms. MEIER. In my written statement, I referenced the Civil Service SES for senior executive programs. They have a set of work competencies, and I think there are elements there to be drawn from in creating that certification program that can be offered over the course of one Congress so no one is burdened by a week-long single training program.

Mr. PHILLIPS. Wonderful.

Well, I thank you all. And, please, any organizations doing great work, if you would, you know, share those with us so that we can elevate and be better ambassadors.

Thank you very much.

The CHAIRMAN. Ms. Hendrix, I see you have more to say, and I want you to say it because I think we want to hear from you.

Go ahead.

Ms. HENDRIX. I have one organization that is actually a Colorado organization. It is Youth Celebrate Diversity, and it trains—it started at Cherry Creek High School in Colorado, and it is about 14 years old, and they do workshops and training. It is a—because I went to Cherry Creek in high school, but it grew out of that, and they have been working for about 14 years, and they do workshops and trainings in Colorado for youth on diversity, equity, and inclusion and social programs in Colorado.

Mr. PHILLIPS. And what is it called, Ms. Hendrix? I am sorry.

Ms. HENDRIX. Youth Celebrate Diversity.

Mr. PHILLIPS. Youth Celebrate Diversity. Okay. I love that. Yes, thank you. I have made notes on all of those. Any more you want to share?

Just one little anecdote if I could take a moment. You know, I remember Business Day in my elementary school about as much as anything, having to create a little business and learn about revenue and expenses and come up with a marketing plan. But that notion for public service, you know, how we might implant those, you know, seeds at much younger ages so people even know that it—so young kids know what is possible and learn how to pass a bill and kind of ignite that potential interest at a younger age.

I would love to work with all of you on that. If you know of organizations doing that already, please send them our way.

With that, now that I am about 10 minutes over time, I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. I have got to tell you, Dean, I think Business Day really nailed it for you. Well done, Business Day.

We have a little bit of time for additional questions if our witnesses are open to that. I will give members an opportunity to ask a second round if they have them.

I had a couple I wanted to ask Ms. Austin Reed. I wanted to get a sense from you of what types of professional networking and training opportunities that groups like the Black Women's Congressional Alliance offer that the House doesn't?

Ms. AUSTIN REED. Thank you so much for that question.

What we try to focus on, Chairman, is market responsive training, so we are—I hear from our members, we hear from our mem-

bers about issues that are very unique to Black women. So, as Kemba mentioned in her—or Ms. Hendrix mentioned in her testimony earlier, she hears from staff that they are stagnant in their offices. They have to leave to come back. There is that anecdotal, but we see it in trying to fill roles constantly. And so we talk about how to, in your office, navigate the inner office politics. For people who are seeking to be a chief of staff, sometimes you don't have that—it is great that Congressman Perlmutter brought up the campaign experience. Sometimes to be a chief, you need that campaign experience. But that is not something that the House can talk about. So we talk about how you get on a campaign and how you develop those skill sets.

So we try to think through, we are not a—it is why we are a network and not an official staff organization at the House. We try to think through all of the unique circumstances of a Black woman, whether that is negotiating your pay, being the only Black woman or person of color in your office. And I think if we could more tailor our trainings to the unique needs of diverse staff in an institution that has been historically White and male, I think you would start to see more defined trainings that are good for that network of staffers.

The CHAIRMAN. And, Ms. Meier, do you have some suggestions for how managerial training can be impactful and long lasting? You know, obviously, there is a broad set of training that would be valuable. But with limited resources being the reality, should we focus our efforts on immersive programs that offer certifications or on-demand training for when managers feel like they don't have the toolset that they need? Give us some guidance.

Ms. MEIER. Thank you for that question because it is critical. Again, the managers really set the tone for how the office is going to function and how you are going to attract and recruit staff. And I believe the ultimate goal or goal to work towards is a longer certification program. Again, I cited in my remarks that Federal service doesn't always provide all of the answers that work on the Hill. But as—if you can build a program and then as staff enters it, then you have got that established way of approaching it and getting managers up and running. But the here and now, I do think, again, there is enough work being done by management organizations, by other groups that focus on training that can be partners for bringing them in and simply expanding the training options. That might be either allowing an extra day of vacation specifically for training or expanding the budgets for offices to send their staff short term to start giving them—you know, create a menu of the top two or three most critical issues that managers are facing.

Too often trainings can come in and be a punitive manner, and I really believe looking at training that staff feels they are getting professional development out of, that they are enhancing themselves, then they are more likely to be willing to commit to that.

I will add from a personal note, I was involved last year in the first of its kind training program for staff through a 501(c)(3) that also offered executive level coaching. This is the kind of training you would get if you were in corporate America. But it is amazingly powerful to provide individuals that ability to build their own leadership development because they are going to bring that strength



to their roles and be stronger, stronger staff members for you. And I hope that there are mechanisms where we can continue that and expand that as an option to staff.

The CHAIRMAN. That is very helpful.

Let me ask if any of the other members who are on have additional questions?

I have gotten texts from many of the committee saying they do not.

Mr. PERLMUTTER. I do.

The CHAIRMAN. Go ahead, Mr. Perlmutter.

Mr. PERLMUTTER. Yes. I just—now that I have gone to a chairmanship of at least a subcommittee in Financial Services—and, clearly, we have staff that has been with the committee for a very long time. I mean, how—and to everybody, how, as a Member of the House, do I encourage like my chairs in Science or Rules or Financial Services or this committee, whatever, how do I encourage my chairs, you know, to really be looking at a diverse staff? And where do they go? Do they go to Ms. Hendrix?

I start with you, Mr. Orton, because you weren't kidding me about the iPad, so I am going to start with you.

Mr. ORTON. Yes. I would say, I mean, when I was on the Hill, Ms. Meier just started the Senate Diversity Initiative, and I think all of those sort of efforts had just started. So I am amazed at some of the progress. And I would say starting there makes a lot of sense to me.

But I think an earlier point was made about sort of the rhetoric and the tone being set at the top by you. I can't stress how important that is. I think if staff understand that this is very much a real priority for the chairperson of a committee or a subcommittee, that carries a long ways I think, you know, setting the culture of the committee or the staff as well for an office. So I would say certainly ODI, to the extent that I understand the work that they are doing. But I think we can't get around the fact that if we don't really put some muscle behind these efforts, investment in these efforts, there is only so much that these offices are going to be able to do. And so I think we do have to sort of take a full look at sort of how this works. But my hope is that we can continue to build out those offices.

Mr. PERLMUTTER. Thank you.

I am prepared to yield back. Thanks Mr. Chair.

Ms. AUSTIN REED. Congressman, I just wanted to volunteer, the Black Women's Congressional Alliance, we help committees and personnel offices fill roles. So staff directors, LDs, chiefs can reach out to us, and we can tap into our network of women to help fill your roles.

Mr. PERLMUTTER. Thank you very much.

Ms. AUSTIN REED. You know, it is not a silver bullet, but we are ready to help.

Mr. PERLMUTTER. Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. Okay. Any other members with a second-round question?

All righty. Seeing none, with that, I would like to thank our witnesses for their testimony today. I am very grateful for your insights, and I have found it very illuminating.

Without objection, all members will have 5 legislative days within which to submit additional written questions for the witnesses to the chair, which will be forwarded to the witnesses for their response. I ask our witnesses to please respond as promptly as you are able.

Without objection, all members will have 5 legislative days within which to submit extraneous materials to the chair for inclusion in the record.

I also just want to thank our terrific staff for putting together such a terrific panel of witnesses, very grateful for the work in pulling this together.

And, with that, we are adjourned. Thanks everybody.

[Whereupon, at 10:31 a.m., the committee was adjourned.]